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GLASS, BOX, CALENDAR, STARS

THE UNEXPECTED TEXT READ:

find aeota yesterday everywhere.

I thought several thoughts, in this sequence:

Okay, I find things. Can do.

Who or what is “aeota?”

Yesterday is gone.

Or is it?

Everywhere’s a big place.

Or is it?

And who knew this Methuselah of a phone of mine could display texts?

I carried a Nokia 7650, thick and clunky as a box of animal crackers and now sixteen years old. I had purchased it new in 2002, partially thanks to the hype associating it with the film *Minority Report*. It seemed highly futuristic right out of the box, maintaining its sci-fi luster for a surprisingly short interval thereafter, as most such products do these days, and had immediately aided me in my work to some acceptable degree that compensated for carrying

it burdensomely in pocket and learning to use it. But after being forced to take several unpleasant and/or unwanted calls at awkward moments, I came to resent its electronic tether, and was always on the indecisive point of throwing it away. I certainly from the outset knew that I had no intention of upgrading it, stepping onto the endless uphill treadmill of Next Great Gadget. I used it nowadays as I had always used it: to place and receive voice calls, and those mainly to my ex, Yulia. I also checked in with my message inbox when I was away from the office.

Of course there was no longer any official support for the orphaned device. Only the ingenuity of my pal Marty Quartz kept the thing alive.

I had never received or sent one single text in those fifteen years, so the appearance of this message was instantly startling.

I noted immediately that the originating number was one of those generic fake strings of digits you see in films, all fives. Someone was spoofing me. So much for any possibility of sourcing the text.

As I pondered the small color screen, about as big as two closed paper matchbooks abreast, the message disappeared, replaced by a question:

PRINT TEXT Y/N?

Could this sucker somehow have connected itself wirelessly to my office printer?

I highlighted Y and jabbed the worn ENTER button between the left and right movement controls.

From the top of the phone, out of a heretofore-invisible slot, a slip of paper the size of a Chinese cookie's fortune began to emerge. It

juddered out with a last jolt and wafted to the floor. I leaned forward half-out of my desk chair to retrieve it.

On it were four symbols that I thought I might have identified positively as emojis, if I actually knew what emojis were:



find aeota yesterday everywhere.

When I looked at the top of the phone whence the slip had emerged, I could discern no opening. However the slip had emerged, the aperture had resealed. I popped the upper back where the SIM card went. No print mechanism met my inspection.

I folded the tiny slip and tucked it into my pants pocket.

I would have to ask Marty about this new capacity of my phone the next time I saw him. Maybe he had retrofitted the device with this new ability.

I spun my chair around to use the keyboard of my desktop computer, which, while not quite as ancient as my phone, had stopped receiving automatic software updates about the time Isabella Rossellini had last been featured in a starring role.

Searching “aeota” returned relatively few hits, just a score of pages, most of links leading to the type of seemingly machine-generated gibberish that apparently constituted half the internet, robot prose to be read by androids. The major sensible usage for the word was as an acronym for the American Essential Oils Trade Association. They had a Facebook page, but their main site seemed to be occupied by a squatter. Well, if they had needed to be found, I had found them sufficiently. I'd have to send them a bill.